

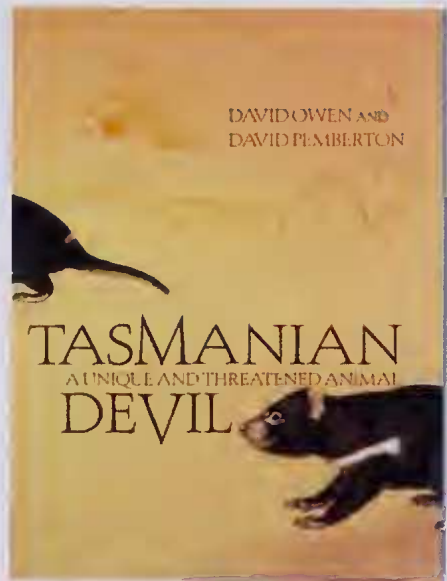
Tasmanian Devil: a Unique and Threatened Animal

by David Owen and David Pemberton

Publisher: *Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, New South Wales, 2005, 225 pages, hard-back; ISBN 1741143683. RRP \$35.00*

Tasmanian Devils are fascinating creatures. They became Australia's largest carnivorous marsupials following extinction of the Thylacine. They remind me of myself – shy, nocturnal, a spicy attitude when required and the ability to eat almost anything! The Tasmanian Devil has endured much prejudice, misunderstanding and persecution over the past 200 years, being labelled 'Beelzebub's pup' and, along with the Thylacine, considered responsible for destruction of livestock. However, 80 years of bounty records collected by Eric Guiler showed that the real culprits were poor management decisions and practices, along with packs of feral dogs. This did not stop the persecution of the Tasmanian Devils, as they were seen to be the bane of sheep farmers, and their perceived notoriety was the inspiration for the famous Warner Brothers' cartoon character, Taz. Recently the Devils have once more come under attack, not by humans, but by the deadly Devil Facial Tumour Disease (DFTD), mutilating the faces of hundreds of Devils and posing the threat of extinction for the species.

Tasmanian Devil: a Unique and Threatened Animal summarises the life and times of the Tasmanian Devil accurately and concisely. It covers the history of the Devil, from the evolution and radiation of the dasyurid family in Australia, the relationship of the Devil with the new settlers of Tasmania and the current threat of DFTD. Although the inclusion of some chapters is questionable (e.g. the supposed link between Errol Flynn and the development of Taz by Warner Bros) every chapter covers an important part of the Tasmanian Devil's history in detail. The particularly interesting sections are the chapters focusing on the life history and ecology of the Devil, which leave the reader thoroughly informed. Did



you know that Tasmanian Devils have remained relatively unchanged in both shape and size for about 70 000 years? Or that an adult Tasmanian Devil can eat up to 40% of its body weight in one meal? It also is concerning to learn that DFTD has killed at least a third of the Tasmanian Devils.

The authors have made use of the many publications and insights by past and present researchers, ensuring the book is a valuable resource for current and potential researchers and for anyone with an interest in these beautiful creatures. Throughout the book there are also many eyewitness accounts, dating from the early 19th century. These provide humour, horror and a sense of disbelief, making the book a thoroughly interesting and entertaining read.

The layout of the book is similar to that of David Owen's book, *Thylacine: The tragic tale of the Tasmanian Tiger*, with extensive black and white photographs and drawings throughout the book as well as eight pages of colour plates at the centre. Overall this book has been the most enjoyable, understandable text I have read regarding Tasmanian Devils. I recommend this book to anyone with an interest in Tasmanian Devils or Tasmanian history.

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